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SEMI-AUTONOMOUS STATUS OF KOREANS IN COMMUNIST MANCHURIA

OIR Report No. 4815

May 16, 1949

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SUMMARY

The 1,200,000 Koreans living in Manchuria are an important strategic minority, comparable in some ways to the Mongols. About half of the Koreans live in the Yen-chi area (the former Chientao Province of the Manchukuo regime),[1] where they constitute 75 percent of the population. The Koreans in the Yen-chi area have been granted extensive special rights, including a degree of administrative autonomy similar to that exercised by the Mongols in Inner Mongolia and in Hsingan Province. They are apparently grouped into villages and hsien under a semi-autonomous area administration nominally responsible to the province of Kirin, with a parallel administrative system for Chinese residents -- an arrangement that fits within the framework of customary Chinese Communist administrative practices. The special rights of the Koreans developed out of the long-standing cooperation between Chinese Communists and Koreans at Yenan during the war and in Manchuria since the end of the war, but were granted principally out of considerations of military and political strategy.

The areas of Manchuria inhabited by the Korean minority, particularly the Yen-chi area (Chientao), are important strategically to each of the three countries involved. The Yen-chi area borders on both the USSR and North Korea. The major lines of rail and highway communications between the Soviet Union and North Korea run through the area, which is only twenty-five miles from Vladivostok. The

1. See appended map.

importance to the USSR of the Koreans in the Yen-chi area hinges on the possibility of using the Korean minority to safeguard Soviet interests and to offset Chinese Communist influence in the vital border region, and on the advantages of having a quasi-neutralized zone in an area where Korean, Soviet, and Chinese interests might clash. Korean semi-autonomy in Yen-chi is of advantage to the Chinese Communists because of the possibilities of (1) continuing or increasing cooperation between North Korea and Communist China, (2) increasing the influence in North Korea of Yenan-trained Korean Communists, and (3) using Koreans in the Northeast as a bargaining group against the Soviet use of the Manchus or special Tung-pei cliques for direct intervention in Manchuria. The advantage to North Korea is that of continued military, political, and economic cooperation with Communist Manchuria.

The semi-autonomy of the Yen-chi area is significant as an illustration of Communist policy toward minorities in China. Yen-chi is of particular interest, however, because the independence of the Yen-chi administration might become a source of embarrassment to the Chinese Communist Party if the Chinese Communists should be unable to maintain their influence among Korean Communists or if friction should develop between the Russians and the Chinese Communists over Manchuria.

SEMI-AUTONOMOUS STATUS OF KOREANS IN COMMUNIST MANCHURIA

INTRODUCTION

There are about 1,200,000 Koreans in Manchuria, most of whom live in the vicinity of the eastern boundary of Manchuria near North Korea and the Maritime Province of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, where they form a highly strategic minority comparable to the Mongols on the western borders of Manchuria.[1] Like the Mongols, the Koreans make up about 3 percent of Manchuria's total population. Both Mongols and Koreans inhabit a region where the cross-currents of Chinese, Soviet, and a third national interest are strong; both have close ties beyond the Chinese borders in territory dominated by the USSR.

Most of the Manchurian Koreans live in the countryside and are engaged in agriculture; there are few urban dwellers among them. About half of them live in the Yen-chi area (the former Chientao Province of the Manchukuo regime),[2] where they make up about three-quarters of the population.[3]

1. See OIR-4532, Postwar Political Developments in Inner Mongolia, February 28, 1946, SECRET.
2. See appended map.
3. See OIR-3779, The Korean Minority in Manchuria, September 15, 1946. The majority of the remaining Koreans in Manchuria live in the former provinces of Fengtien (11 percent of total Korean population in Manchuria), Kirin (10 percent). The Koreans form a significant proportion of the population in two of these provinces, Mutanchiang (17 percent of population of the province) and Tunghua (10 percent). Migration since the war has probably resulted in an even greater concentration of Koreans in Chientao as compared with other provinces.

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Since 1946 numerous and often conflicting reports have been received regarding the status of Koreans in the hsien (counties) bordering on North Korea and on the Maritime Province. These have ranged from rumors of proposed annexation by North Korea of part of these areas to reports of extensive special rights granted the Koreans by the Chinese Communists.[1] The strategic and economic importance of the areas involved and the military, economic, and political role played by non-Chinese minorities in Manchuria lend significance to these rumors and make an evaluation of the present status of Koreans in the Northeast important.

A. Special Status of Koreans in the Yen-chi Area (Chientao)

Before 1931 the Chinese required many Koreans residing in Manchuria to become naturalized citizens; only in the Chientao area were they permitted to retain their Korean status.

The Koreans, unlike most other aliens in China, were subject to Chinese laws and courts. After the establishment of Manchukuo, the Koreans were placed under a dual Japanese-Chinese nationality of doubtful legality.

The Chinese Communists have not continued previous Chinese policies toward the Koreans, but have granted extensive "special

1. The reports of cession of Yen-chi and other areas to North Korea have not been confirmed and probably do not represent Communist intentions.

rights" and a degree of autonomy to the Koreans in Manchuria. In most places these rights are limited to cultural fields such as education, press, and language. However, in the Yen-chi area, where most of the Koreans live, the Chinese Communists seem to have granted the Koreans a considerable degree of political as well as cultural autonomy. The governmental system in this area is probably an extension of the dual political system traditionally followed by the Chinese in areas where ethnic minorities have lived intermixed with the Chinese.[1] There are probably two systems of local government, one to deal with Koreans and one with Chinese.

The precise nature of these arrangements has not been reported. It is likely, however, that the Koreans in the Yen-chi area are governed through hsiang (administrative villages) and hsien (counties), reporting to a semi-autonomous Yen-chi area administration nominally

1. There is considerable precedent in Chinese usage, Nationalist and Imperial as well as Communist, for granting a degree of administrative autonomy to minority groups, although Koreans have not previously been included among groups thus privileged. In the Mongol areas of Manchuria, for example, it is common for two governments to administer the same area; there is a Chinese hsien and province system plus a Mongol league and banner system. The most interesting parallel to the situation as it exists in the Yen-chi area is provided by the Hulunbuir (Hsingan) area. The Chinese Government (i.e., the provincial government of Hsingan) is gradually fading out of the picture; the Communist radio has been conspicuously omitting Hsingan from lists of Northeastern provinces. At the same time the Hulunbuir government is gaining a firmer status.

responsible to the province of Kirin.[1] The Chinese living in the same area are probably grouped into hsien of their own that are not under the Yen-chi government but are responsible directly to the Kirin provincial government.

Since the Chinese Communists usually grant considerable independence to governmental units on the lower levels, such as the hsiang and hsien, the system described can be fitted into the general scheme of Communist administration. The fact that the Chinese in the area are more urban than the Koreans lessens the problems of duplication, particularly since the centralizing influence of the Communist Party would tend to counteract any lack of coordination inherent in such a system of parallel administration.

B. Historical Background: Korean Troops and Chinese Communist Forces

Present Chinese Communist policy toward the Koreans in Manchuria has developed out of the relationship between the Chinese

1. The organization of a semi-autonomous Korean administration in Yen-chi was reported late in 1946. This administration was reported to include the hsien of Yen-chi, Wang-ch'ing, Hun-ch'un, Ho-lung, and An-t'u, which made up the former Japanese province of Chientao. The Communist P'yong-yang radio has on several occasions referred to the special rights of Koreans in Manchuria. New China News Agency dispatches detailing recent administrative changes in Manchuria have referred to hsien on either side of the former province of Chientao, but Chientao itself has been conspicuously omitted. This lends further credence to reports of special status for that area. The fact that the hsien of the former provinces of Mutanchiang and T'unghua have been specifically placed under various provincial administrations makes it unlikely that these areas, which are more sparsely populated with Koreans, have been included in the special Korean district, as was reported on various occasions.

Communists and the Korean troops in China during the war and in Manchuria and North Korea since the Japanese surrender. Details of military organization in Communist China have often been significant indications of future changes in administrative organization.[1]

The Chinese Communists and Korean military and political leaders have maintained close and friendly relations since 1939, when the Korean Volunteer Army was formed at Yenan as a nucleus for a future Korean revolutionary army. The Koreans who were trained at Yenan during the war included refugees and deserters from Manchukuo as well as from Korea and from the Japanese Army; many popular leaders in North Korea today received their training in Yenan. The cooperation between Chinese and Korean Communists continued after VJ-day; the Korean Volunteer Army agreed to assist the Chinese Communist forces in the "liberation" of the Northeast in exchange for promises of aid in a future Korean revolution and recognition of the rights of Koreans in Manchuria. The Korean Volunteer Army accompanied the Chinese Communist forces into Manchuria and began to recruit among the Korean population of the Northeast. During 1946 many officers of the Korean Volunteer Army

1. For example, the autonomy of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government was presaged by the independence of the Inner Mongolian troops; the North China Military Area was a precursor of the North China Liberated Area; etc.

were transferred to North Korea and most Korean units were incorporated into the "Northeast United Democratic Army" of the Chinese Communists. Some of the branch columns (divisions) retained their Korean identity; other Korean troops were either distributed in small groups throughout the Chinese Communist forces or relegated to rear-line and "Peace Preservation" units. More recently the Korean forces in Manchuria have been augmented by the transfer of units and recruits from North Korea to Manchuria for training, for combat experience, and possibly for concealment of the true strength of potential Communist forces in Korea.

The Korean troops have been reported to be concentrated under Korean command in a "Suining Military District" consisting of the former Chientao and Mutanchiang Provinces. The existence of such a district may have been the basis for some of the rumors of the establishment of a semi-autonomous Korean "Province of Suining" but there has been no confirmed indication that Korean administrative autonomy ever extended over so wide an area. Other reports have named Yen-chi as the headquarters of the "Northeast Korean People's Liberation Army"; this would tend to confirm reports of a corresponding semi-autonomous civil government in Yen-chi.

The precise connection between the organization of Korean troops in Manchuria and the administrative forms in which the special rights of Koreans are now expressed has not been established. However, any evaluation of the development of a large degree of autonomy for Koreans

in the Northeast must take into consideration the close and friendly cooperation that continues to exist between Chinese and Korean Communists[1] and the independence that the Chinese Communists have granted some of the Korean military formations, particularly in the former Chientao and Mutanchiang Provinces.

C. Cross-Currents of Interests in the Yen-chi Area

The motivation for the creation of a Manchurian district in which Koreans exercise considerable independence probably was more strategic than ethnic, and was certainly based on more than wartime friendships and promises to the Korean Volunteer Army, although all of these were involved. The boundaries of three countries intersect at the eastern tip of the former Chientao Province. Considerations of Soviet, Chinese, and North Korean interests must have combined to influence the development of the present status of Koreans in these areas.

1. Soviet Interests. The Soviet Union's interest in the sections of Manchuria inhabited by Koreans stems from its general interest in Manchuria as a "sphere of influence" and its specific concern with the region's strategic location in regard to North Korea and the far eastern regions of the USSR.

1. Military cooperation between the Chinese Communists and North Korean forces and Chinese Communist aid to subversive activities in South Korea are reported to be increasing during the current tension in Korea.

The Yen-chi area borders on both North Korea and the Maritime Provinces and includes a narrow tongue of land jutting between Korea and the USSR. The major lines of rail and highway communication between the Soviet Union and North Korea have to pass through the Yen-chi area and the former Mutanchiang Province. Mu-tan-chiang City is a major rail center on the short southern route of the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, which is only twenty-five miles from the Yen-chi area.[1]

The USSR has long maintained a general interest in Manchurian minorities -- Mongols, Koreans, Tungus, etc. Little is known about the Soviet attitude toward the claims of Manchurian Koreans for special status. However, in view of the Soviet attitude toward other minorities near the borders of the USSR, particularly in Inner Mongolia, Hsingan, and Sinkiang, it seems reasonable to assume that the USSR supports some of the Korean wishes.

The advantages to the USSR of semi-autonomy for the Manchurian Koreans would include: (1) the possibility of utilizing the Korean minority to safeguard Soviet interests; (2) the offsetting of Chinese Communist influence in the vital border regions by the possibly more amenable Korean minority; and (3) the strategic advantage of having a quasi-neutralized zone in an area where strong Korean, Soviet, and Chinese interests might clash.

1. See appended map.

There has been no confirmed report of Soviet pressure for outright annexation of the Yen-chi area to North Korea.

2. Chinese Communist Interests. The attitude of the Chinese Communists toward special Korean demands in the Northeast has not been specifically stated, although the Communists have repeatedly promised to respect Korean rights in Manchuria. In response to Soviet pressure, Yen-chi and other areas might conceivably be ceded to North Korea. Such an action, however, would be difficult to reconcile with the Chinese Communist Party's stand on the integrity of Chinese territory and would be extremely unpopular among nationalistic Chinese. The limited autonomy that has been granted the Koreans in Yen-chi may represent an optimum compromise between the conflicting considerations of the Russians, Chinese, and Koreans.

The advantages that could accrue to the Chinese Communists from the course they seem to have taken include: (1) continuing or increasing cooperation between North Korea and Communist China in military, economic, and diplomatic relations; (2) the possibility of increasing the influence in North Korea of the Korean Communists trained at Yenan as against the Koreans trained in Khazakstan by the Russians; and (3) the possibility of using Koreans in the Northeast as a bargaining group against such groups as the Manchus or the Tung-pei cliques, which the USSR might conceivably use for direct

intervention in Manchuria.

3. North Korean Interests. The interests of the North Korean Government in these regions stem from considerations of security similar to those which are influencing the USSR; from economic factors, including the resources and transport routes of Yen-chi; and from irredentist feelings of Korean nationalists. Since North Korea needs the continuing friendship, trade, and cooperation of Communist Manchuria, the present status of Yen-chi may represent a maximum concession to North Korea.

The advantages to North Korea of the special status of Koreans in Manchuria would include: (1) the possibility of continuing military, political, and economic cooperation with Communist Manchuria; (2) a gain in prestige throughout Korea for the North Korean government as a result of improvement in the status of Koreans in a neighboring Communist country; (3) the facilitation of trade with the adjoining sections of Manchuria; and (4) the strategic advantage of having the North Korean frontiers protected by a special zone in which strong North Korean influences prevail.

D. Significance

The semi-autonomous status of the Koreans in Yen-chi is an illustration of the tendency of the Chinese Communists to create separate administrations for minority groups. These semi-autonomous administrations have not been set up because of an unwillingness to

coerce minorities; in any case, the Communist Party control nullifies much of the nominal autonomy granted these administrations. In each case -- Inner Mongolia, Hulunbuir, Yen-chi -- there are evidences of Soviet influence brought to bear directly or through a satellite country. Each of these areas is of concern not only to China, but also to an adjoining Soviet satellite and to the Soviet Union itself. In each of these areas the Chinese Communists are faced with the difficult problem of reconciling the demands of a minority group, of a Soviet satellite, and of the Soviet Union with the feelings of nationalistic Chinese. The semi-autonomy of the Yen-chi area may well represent a stable compromise among varying interests, but the fact that no public mention of the present arrangement has been made by Chinese Communist sources is of interest. If the Chinese Communist Party should lose some of the influence it now has among many North Korean leaders, or if friction should develop between the Russians and the Chinese Communists in the Northeast, the independence of the Yen-chi administration might become a source of embarrassment to the Chinese Communist Party.

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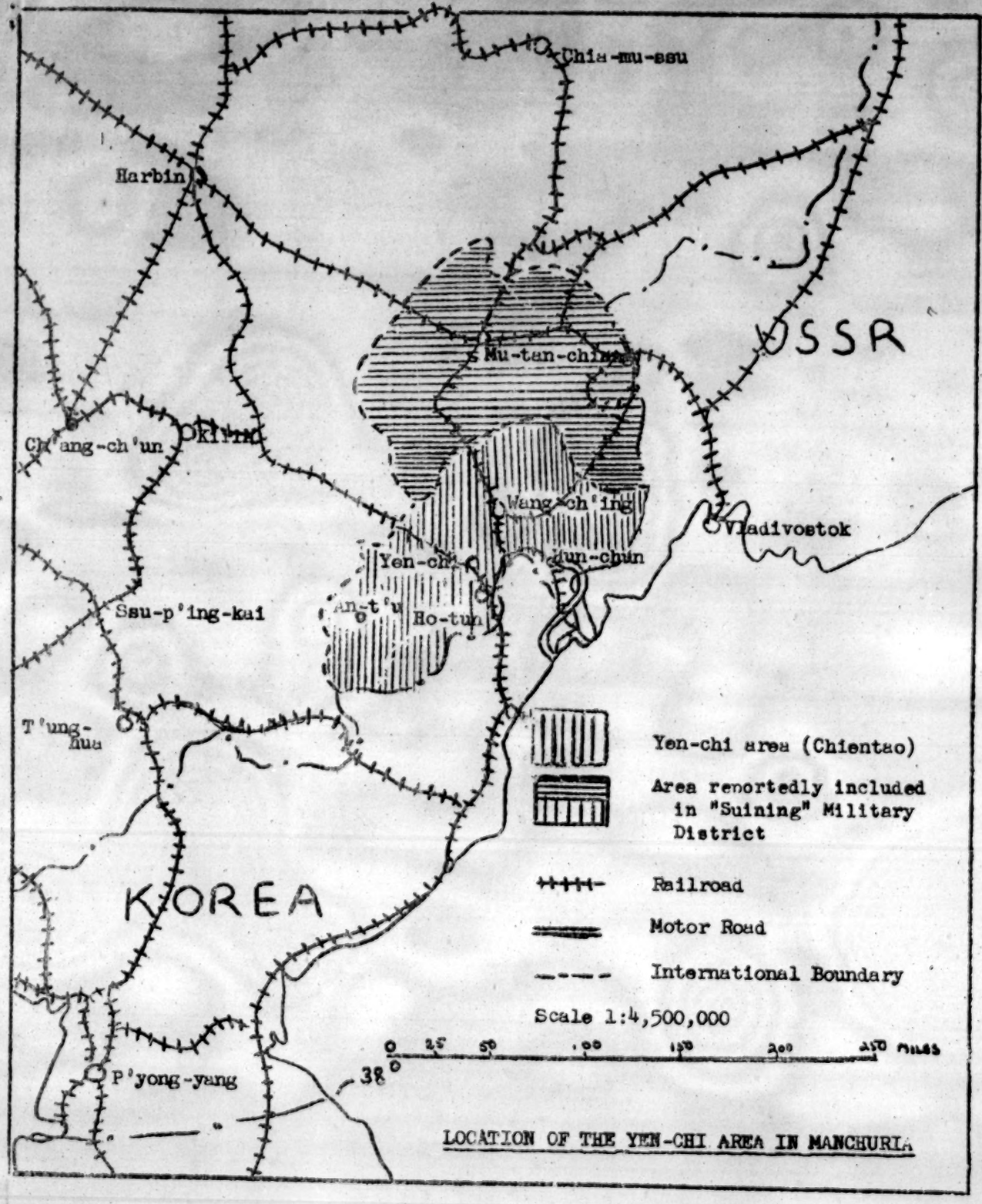

LOCATION OF THE YEN-CHI AREA IN MANCHURIA

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